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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 9 July 1992, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. TRAXLER (Italy)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Traxler (Italy), Vice-President, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME:

(a) ASSISTANCE IN THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ASSISTANCE DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES (continued) (E/1992/47)

The PRESIDENT said that, to assist delegations in focusing their debate, the secretariat had prepared a list of priority issues of coordination in the area of poverty eradication. At the Headquarters level those were: first, the need to develop a system-wide agreed approach, or strategy for poverty eradication and a mechanism for coordination; second, the need for closer consultation and cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and the other agencies in the design, sequencing and implementation of structural adjustment programmes, in order to incorporate poverty-eradication goals in those programmes; third, a review by each agency of its poverty-eradication objectives and commitments in the 1990s to give them renewed priority; fourth, the need to develop common approaches to data collection and the development and use of social indicators; fifth, the necessary actions for effective follow-up and implementation of agreed conclusions and goals at high-level inter-agency meetings, such as those in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), the high-level meeting on poverty alleviation and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank seminars, and the need to monitor progress achieved; sixth, the necessary actions to mitigate the inadequacy of resources and to enhance efficiency and effectiveness; and seventh, the necessary actions to achieve better sharing and allocation of responsibilities among various agencies.

(The President)

Priority issues at the country level comprised: first, the need to develop a common country-specific anti-poverty strategy and the harmonization of programmes within that common framework; second, the need to strengthen the leadership role of the resident coordinators on the basis of a team approach to poverty eradication; third, the need to develop closer and complementary collaboration between agencies and the regional commissions; fourth, the need to develop operational linkages between country-specific anti-poverty strategy and sectoral programmes and projects in that country; fifth, coordination with Governments and, where required, the provision of coordinated assistance to enhance the institutional capacity of the Government to establish a well-coordinated anti-poverty strategy and to relate sectoral programmes and projects to that strategy; and sixth, the necessary actions to develop cooperation and complementarity with bilateral donors, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the field.

Mr. DADZIE (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) said that one essential component of an effective strategy to fight poverty was the pursuit of patterns of growth which ensured the productive use of the assets, especially the labour, of the poor. In addition, the capacity of the poor to take advantage of employment opportunities must be enhanced, through the provision of basic social services and well-targeted transfers, and safety nets must be established for those who were unable to benefit from those processes or were particularly vulnerable to shocks and the severe impact of structural adjustment.

While domestic policy was crucial to the alleviation of poverty, international assistance was essential to support national efforts, and UNCTAD believed that, given the necessary political commitment of Governments, the task of containing and even reducing the numbers of the poor by the end of the 1990s was feasible. The attainment of that goal would largely depend, however, on the contribution of the United Nations system.

The Cartagena Conference had committed all States to work together in a new international partnership for development to erase the scourge of poverty and deprivation in the developing world, and it had established a new UNCTAD Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation, which would provide an important

(Mr. Dadzie)

forum for the exchange of experience and the promotion of international consensus on principles and strategies for action in that area. The Committee would review existing information and analyses on poverty issues, drawing on the valuable work already accomplished by the United Nations system, and would then proceed to a focused and integrated review of national policies at the country level, including an assessment of the impact of structural adjustment programmes on poverty alleviation.

The third broad area of its work would be the examination of poverty-related sectoral issues, including official development assistance, social development programmes, the impact of trade expansion and the relationship between demographic factors, such as migration and poverty alleviation, and complementary international support measures. The Standing Committee would also explore the linkages between the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development and would be guided by the need to assist the Council and the General Assembly in their overall policy and coordination responsibilities. The Committee's work would be based on high-quality analysis, conducted in full consultation with the other organizations of the system, drawing on their own technical work and that of other bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), academic institutions and non-governmental organizations in the area of poverty.

Finally, he said that UNCTAD set great store by consultation, concertation and cooperation in its new tasks and would welcome any guidance from the Council with a view to an integrated, coherent and global approach to the eradication of poverty and the role of UNCTAD in that endeavour.

Mr. AHMED (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) said that, with a total of 3.1 billion people in 1990, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the world's population. About 800 million people in the ESCAP region, approximately three quarters of the world's poor, lived in conditions of absolute poverty. The situation was further exacerbated by large-scale migration, a consequence of increased urbanization, which caused rural poverty to be transferred to the urban area and created more stresses.

(Mr. Ahmed)

In Asia, poverty was intrinsically linked with lack of education, particularly among the female population in South Asia, where female illiteracy rates ranged as high as 90 per cent in some countries. Prominent among the causes of poverty in the Asian and Pacific region was population growth, and while many countries had successfully limited their population growth rates, their sheer size made any increments to their populations a matter of great concern. Children below the age of 14 constituted more than 40 per cent of the population of many countries in the region, with alarming implications for the poverty situation and its perpetuation in the future, particularly since a high proportion of those children would remain illiterate.

Despite impressive economic growth in several countries over the previous two decades, the poverty problem remained intractable throughout the region and, in its disadvantaged countries, was seriously aggravated by economic stagnation. At the political level, poverty was a serious destabilizing factor and could endanger the generally peaceful nature of development in the region.

He described various innovative poverty-alleviation programmes which had been implemented in the region, often with considerable success. Those programmes were part of a general ESCAP policy to encourage a mutually beneficial exchange of experience among member States, enabling countries to develop new strategies on the lines of those which had proved successful elsewhere.

Poverty in Asia was an aggravating factor in many other economic and social ills, such as environmental degradation, crime, drug abuse and prostitution. With a population growth rate of approximately 1.9 per cent, 60 million people were being added to the region every year, with potentially disastrous consequences unless more intensive efforts were made to break the back of poverty. At the Commission's forty-eighth session in Beijing in April 1992, the issue of poverty alleviation had been given priority attention and, as part of the Commission's rationalization of its programme orientation, it had set up a new thematic committee on poverty alleviation to address the problem on a regional level, just as the new UNCTAD Committee on Poverty Alleviation would at a global level. At its forty-seventh session in 1991,

(Mr. Ahmed)

ESCAP had adopted a resolution on regional support for the alleviation of poverty, which put forward the idea of a ministerial meeting in 1994 on poverty alleviation. Consequently, there could be a major regional conference on the issue in the ESCAP region in 1994.

Lack of resources placed a major constraint on efforts to meet the needs of the developing countries in the region. Regional coordination had focused to date on the alleviation of rural poverty, with the establishment in Bangkok in 1977 of the Inter-Agency Committee on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific. The Inter-Agency Committee had been concerned with the gathering and dissemination of information and with the promotion of participatory rural development, off-farm and on-farm employment strategies and integrated area development. He was confident that in due course the scope of inter-agency coordination could be expanded beyond rural poverty to encompass all activities involved in meeting the challenge of poverty alleviation in Asia.

Mrs. SADIK (United Nations Population Fund) said that the population of the developing world would increase by an additional 900 million during the 1990s, placing a constantly increasing burden on health, education, employment, housing and related services and leading to a proportionate increase in the number of poor, predominantly women and children. In its turn, the increasingly serious problem of migration was due to a combination of poverty and population pressures. The links between population factors and economic development had been demonstrated in the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) publication The State of World Population 1992, which had shown that countries with slower population growth were better able to sustain economic performance.

The eradication of poverty would liberate a vital resource for national development and it was therefore essential, through integrated and well-coordinated efforts, to ensure that development programmes reached the poor and to offset the negative consequences of structural adjustment programmes, particularly on women and children. Efforts already made towards that goal included the multisectoral Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme, in which the World Bank, UNDP and UNFPA all participated,

(Mrs. Sadik)

country-level consultations involving the World Bank and IMF to ensure that family-planning and population programmes were not affected by their structural adjustment programmes, and other initiatives carried out within the context of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP).

Development resources were limited and should therefore be carefully targeted to achieve maximum impact. Investment in women's training, extension services and credit, in health care and family planning, in education and in human-resource development were all effective development strategies. While investment in social development was highly cost-effective, it was not an alternative to other forms of investment and would only pay off in the context of a growing economy. For that reason it was essential to generate new resources for development.

The human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic currently affected an estimated 10 to 12 million people world wide and while the pandemic was not expected to have a major impact on population growth rates in the short or medium term, UNFPA continued to finance studies of its demographic impact and believed that it rendered even more crucial increased investment in family-planning programmes, which could offer a range of AIDS-prevention and control activities.

At the country level, an integrated, multisectoral and well-coordinated approach, involving a true partnership between Governments, agencies and non-governmental organizations, was essential. UNFPA would continue to cooperate closely with the United Nations family in order to establish such a mechanism and therefore supported the holding of a world summit for social development in 1995, as an excellent opportunity for more coordinated and sustained action.

Attacking the social roots of poverty - illiteracy, poor health and the subordination of women - was an essential task of development in the 1990s, leading to economic health, slower population growth and the protection of the environment, and would help create the balance necessary to guarantee development, not merely survival, in the twenty-first century.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) said that poverty was an infinitely complex and intractable problem so that it was very hard to offer generally valid approaches for its elimination. Despite its complexity and the wide range of possible approaches, a number of idées-forces underlay the ECLAC secretariat's thinking on that problem, for instance the idea that economic growth was a prerequisite for reducing poverty. It would continue to lend its support, in the area of analysis and policy design, to the fight against poverty, while supporting operational activities valuable to those who formulated and carried out public policy. Thus, it had collaborated with UNDP and the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation of Chile in organizing the Third Regional Conference on Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Santiago, Chile, in late 1992.

Similarly, a number of United Nations agencies had, in the previous two years, launched joint activities with the Latin American Economic System (SELA) in the area of social policy. The ECLAC secretariat had acted as a focal point in that joint effort. The ECLAC system was also operating, with the Organization of American States, a joint programme on social policies for Latin America and the Caribbean whose central objective was to rationalize public social spending by developing ways of evaluating the cost-effectiveness of social projects whose benefits were hard to quantify in monetary terms.

Finally, ECLAC had prepared the basic document for the third meeting of organizations on proposals for integrated social policies vis-à-vis macroeconomic adjustments in the Latin American and Caribbean region, held recently in Caracas, which had reached a number of agreements on joint activities in the field of social policy.

Mr. DIALLO (Economic Commission for Africa) said that nowhere was the impact of poverty so devastating and degrading as in Africa. Nearly half of the African people lived in abject poverty; still more lacked public health services and even safe water. Worse, the number of poor in Africa was projected to increase by more than 100 million by the year 2000, while a decrease of 400 million was forecast world wide. Africa would then account for more than 30 per cent of all the poor in the developing world, as compared to 16 per cent in 1985. At the same time, famine, war and civil strife had

(Mr. Diallo)

continued unabated, making tens of millions of Africans refugees and displaced persons. That situation was staggering and unacceptable, and showed that the eradication of poverty must assume a cardinal place in Africa's development strategies and economic-reform programmes.

Poverty could only be eliminated if economic growth could be accelerated, sustained and made to benefit the masses of the poor, who must be given access to the means of production and made productive; they, and the people at large, must generate development through genuine democratic participation; and a balance must be struck between population growth, economic growth and environmental protection.

The 1980s had been called Africa's "lost decade", so disappointing had African countries' economic performance been, and the previous three years' record had been no better: gross domestic product had grown at no more than 2.6 per cent, representing a decline in average per capita income.

The severe drought in eastern and southern Africa was a reminder of how fragile the African economy was. The continuing conflicts, too, showed that Africa's economic, social and political fortunes were intimately intertwined.

The malaise of the African economy would be cured, poverty eliminated and standards of living improved only if African countries could restructure their economies in such a way as to achieve sustained and environmentally sustainable growth and development. Poverty would not be eradicated if measures were piecemeal or skirted the real issues. The eradication of poverty must be at the heart of any development strategy or reform programme.

Paradoxically, the implementation of reform and structural adjustment programmes by many African countries had hurt the vulnerable groups and had had visible adverse social impact; such programmes needed to be made human-centred and embedded in strategies for long-term development and transformation. There was a growing consensus to that effect; what remained was to translate that consensus into action.

In December 1991, the General Assembly had adopted the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, which embodied the international consensus on the actions that African countries had undertaken to implement during that decade to achieve sustained and sustainable

(Mr. Diallo)

development. Issues related to the eradication of poverty, structural transformation and adjustment lay at the heart of the New Agenda, and it provided the best framework for the coordination of Africa-related policies and activities of the United Nations system, which should be harmonized among the various agencies at the country level. Such harmonization must arise from Africa's own development strategies, and should also apply to the activities of the United Nations system in support of poverty eradication and vulnerable groups. From the very beginning, considerations of poverty alleviation and sustainable development must be made part and parcel of development and of economic reform and structural adjustment programmes.

Mr. JABER (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) said that armed conflicts and their aftermath had forced an ever-increasing number of people into poverty and brought a deterioration in social conditions that would be felt for a long time to come, affecting all segments of the population but especially disadvantaged groups. With those conditions in mind the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) had undertaken a number of studies to assess the impact of the Gulf crisis, with its massive return of labour from the Gulf and Iraq, on several countries in the region.

In order to cope with the financial and economic imbalances, several countries had been pursuing adjustment policies, including reduction of subsidies and other public expenditures, that could be quite harmful to disadvantaged groups. A number of studies were to be done of such policies and their impact in various ESCWA countries, including Jordan and Egypt, and would be discussed at an expert group meeting in 1993 with a view to formulating policies to reduce the negative social and economic impact of adjustment policies in the countries of the region.

ESCWA had undertaken a number of activities focused on alleviating poverty in those countries, including several to assist vulnerable segments of society, particularly poor women, the disabled and elderly persons. New efforts included activities directed at drug addiction, one of the social ailments associated with poverty.

An assessment of the impact of the Gulf crisis on women returnees and their families was planned; not only had such families lost their income, but

(Mr. Jaber)

their social support system had also been disrupted. There was a need to evaluate the social, educational, health and employment problems facing the displaced populations as they attempted to reorganize their lives.

In undertaking the activities described, ESCWA would attempt to cooperate closely with its sister organizations within the United Nations system; given the lack of resources available to combat mass poverty, a coordinated approach was very much needed.

Mr. URZUA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the programme of UNESCO was built on the premise that development would be sustainable only if human development, equity and respect for natural ecosystems were sought through continuous strengthening of democratic processes. UNESCO was, accordingly, conducting activities in cooperation with member States aimed at reducing extreme poverty, including assistance to Governments during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, with particular emphasis on education.

UNESCO had organized, with the International Labour Organisation, an inter-agency task force on austerity, adjustment and human resources, and had held informal meetings with other United Nations and international organs active in Latin America on integrated social policies and structural adjustments for the region. Such informal meetings had made it possible to coordinate the activities of all participants related to structural adjustment, while defining a series of joint activities for the future.

There was a need for new activities involving the people in the solution of the social problems collectively affecting them. Conscious of that, UNESCO had been collaborating with member States, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions in their efforts to mobilize the urban poor to participate in solving infrastructural and social problems affecting urban areas. The role of women as agents of change and how families were coping with their problems were two important issues being looked at.

High rates of population growth in most of the least developed countries and their still limited use of family planning, as well as the urban explosion affecting all of them, hampered efforts to reduce poverty and achieve

(Mr. Urzua, UNESCO)

sustainable development; success would depend on lower population growth, smaller differences in family size between poor and less poor, and a more balanced population distribution.

The crucial non-economic factor in making such efforts successful was human-resource development through the transfer and exchange of knowledge and through information, education and communication programmes. The World Declaration on Education for All included among the means to meet basic learning needs not just formal and informal education programmes, but also all available instruments and sources of information, communication and social action. The strengthening of communication capacities and infrastructures in the developing countries, to which UNESCO was devoting considerable effort, thus became another weapon in the fight against poverty.

That fight would not be won, and development would not become sustainable, if the gap in scientific and technical knowledge between the developed and developing countries continued to grow. Therefore, UNESCO was implementing programmes aimed at strengthening the capacities of the least developed countries in university education in the basic and engineering sciences as well as promoting scientific and technical research.

Practically all the activities he had mentioned were being conducted in collaboration with other agencies; however, no system-wide mechanism for coordinating anti-poverty activities had yet been established. UNESCO supported the Secretary-General's suggestion for a high-level inter-agency meeting to arrive at a common understanding of and approach to a set of social indicators for data collection on poverty and related issues.

Ms. SHELLEY (World Meteorological Organization) said that her organization defined poverty as a serious lack of one or more of the basics of life: air, water, food, sanitation, good health and shelter. Poverty was multifaceted and must be addressed in a multifaceted way. In the struggle to obtain the basics of life, long-term effects were often overlooked for the sake of short-term relief, and people caught in the throes of poverty were unlikely to be able to rectify their own situation. The search for food and water and the struggle for survival in the aftermath of such natural disasters

(Ms. Shelley, WMO)

as floods and drought were possibly the worst context for rational, systematic efforts to relieve poverty. Leadership and vision were needed if the United Nations was to make a lasting impact.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) believed that routine analysis and prediction of the amounts of water available would help to determine what controls were needed so as to avert critical shortages and unsanitary conditions in the future. Again, decisions on what crops to plant, when to plant and when to harvest would be easier if seasonal forecasts of rainfall amounts were available. Poverty could to some extent be alleviated if there existed a study of each country's potential for growing food and raising livestock, taking into account climate, soil and cultural characteristics. A switch to renewable energy sources, especially for routine uses such as solar cookers, would slow environmental degradation and thereby alleviate poverty. Finally, accurate long-term predictions of climate change would help determine sustainable policies and help planners to achieve cost-effectiveness in the near and long term.

WMO's research showed that one of the greatest threats of global warming would be increased weather fluctuations such as the droughts and flooding caused by El Niño and the Southern Oscillation, which had been one cause of the drought in Africa in 1992, the worst in living memory. Indeed, in January 1992 WMO had issued an El Niño advisory.

Those threats were being faced at a time when, owing to the constraints of national economies, many weather- and water-observation systems were poorly equipped and in need of trained staff. With the new spirit of cooperation among the agencies, perhaps those facilities could be put to use again to help the poorest, those who lived on the land and needed to know about the weather so that they could optimize their natural resources. WMO, with the Council's help, stood ready to assist them.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that it was a disgrace to humanity that more than 1 billion people were living in absolute poverty in 1992.

He agreed with the Secretary-General that coordination of efforts to combat poverty should be understood as a means of working together towards

(Mr. Barnett, United Kingdom)

common goals with the aim of ensuring that the United Nations functioned as a system that was more than the sum of its parts. However, the individual entities of the system should not be allowed to proceed with their own mandates and priorities irrespective of the wider responsibilities of the system as a whole or of Member States. Moreover, poverty must not be viewed as an isolated issue; poverty alleviation clearly was at the heart of development.

It was encouraging to note the growing agreement within the system on the broad approaches and strategies to be pursued for the alleviation and eradication of poverty and in the design and implementation of structural adjustment programmes. The members of the European Community were particularly supportive of efforts to prevent the burdens imposed by structural adjustment programmes from falling disproportionately on the poorest groups in society.

He welcomed cooperation between the entities of the United Nations system in such bodies as the ACC Task Force on Rural Development and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP). There was a clear need for a mechanism to address poverty on a system-wide basis. ACC should urgently consider that question and either assume the responsibility itself or identify a suitable mechanism at an appropriately senior level. He would welcome the views of the agencies on the best internal forum for ensuring genuine inter-agency coordination, as well as on the suggestion to appoint poverty coordinators in each United Nations agency and fund.

Member States also had an important responsibility to ensure that the guidance provided through the agencies' governing bodies was consistent with a coordinated strategy to fight poverty. Coordination at the field level was imperative, and the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/47) rightly stressed the need to formulate, in close cooperation with recipient Governments, integrated programmes of action to ensure an effective United Nations system response to country-specific needs. The report also correctly underscored the importance of strengthening the role of the resident coordinator, adopting a multilateral team approach under his leadership and improving the harmonization of United Nations programmes with those of recipient countries.

(Mr. Barnett, United Kingdom)

Those proposals had been endorsed in General Assembly resolution 44/211. However, there had been few results, and the views of the agencies on how to overcome the barriers to achieving those goals would be welcome.

Lastly, he said that both at Headquarters and in the field, a crucial benchmark in assessing the effectiveness of United Nations efforts to combat poverty should be the degree to which they contributed to human development.

Mr. WU Hailong (China) highlighted various problems which had plagued the developing countries since the early 1980s. The United Nations, faced with a world in which one fifth of the population lived in poverty, had made the eradication of poverty a top priority in the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade.

Although some progress had been made, the agencies in the United Nations system lacked a coherent policy. Also lacking was a general mechanism to coordinate the activities of the various components of the United Nations system. The ACC Task Force on Rural Development, its Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational) (CCSQ) (OPS) and JCGP had limited terms of reference and thus could only play a modest role.

His delegation recommended that, in order to enable the agencies to carry out their work in a concerted manner, the United Nations system should establish a system-wide framework inspired by the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade. Furthermore, a designated body should be charged with overall coordination of poverty eradication. To avoid the proliferation of new bodies, consideration should be given to assigning the task to ACC or to expanding the mandate of its Task Force on Rural Development.

It was also important to strengthen coordination between resident coordinators and recipient countries and formulate programmes and projects which were consistent with the priorities of the recipient countries, thereby maximizing the impact of limited resources. It was also necessary to strengthen coordination at the national level, and the proposal that each agency should designate a coordinator as a contact on poverty issues merited consideration.

Mr. HUSLID (Observer for Norway) said it was appropriate that poverty had been singled out for discussion in the coordination segment of the session, since in many poor countries poverty was the main obstacle to human progress and improvement of the environment. Poverty eradication was a multidimensional task requiring a broad approach that simultaneously emphasized many factors, including increased production, structural change, improved productivity, education and training, health services, real popular participation and accountable government. Special corrective measures were needed in order to prevent structural adjustment programmes from having a negative impact in the social field and from unfavourably affecting the most vulnerable groups in society.

He invited the agency representatives to provide guidance on how to ensure that actions to eradicate poverty reached the poorest segments of society, since they were not always easy to reach. He also wondered what different strategies were required in order to reach different groups of the poor and what practical measures had proved most effective. Further information on the experience and progress of the various organizations in conceptualizing and implementing programmes to combat poverty would be most welcome.

He hoped that the recently established UNCTAD Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation would make a valuable contribution to the evaluation of policies and experience and the initiation of action-oriented programmes. The Committee should cooperate closely with the United Nations, the specialized agencies and Governments.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) welcomed the recognition by many speakers of the need for United Nations country anti-poverty strategies that encompassed all relevant United Nations agencies and programmes. Such strategies would help avoid duplication in the field and facilitate relations between Governments and the development community. Non-governmental organizations, which often were at the cutting edge of new approaches to poverty alleviation, also should be involved in devising the strategies, and he was pleased that other speakers had expressed similar views. Lastly, he would like to hear the views of the agencies on how to foster popular participation in the alleviation of poverty.

Mr. CHAMBERS (International Labour Organisation) said that the United Kingdom representative had drawn an important distinction between action at the Headquarters level and action at the country level. Those responses definitely had to be differentiated. Furthermore, the agencies must be responsive to instructions from the General Assembly which, in its resolution 44/211, had made it abundantly clear that the responsibility for coordinating all anti-poverty action rested with Governments. He emphasized very strongly that the success of any integrated poverty-alleviation strategies and coordination efforts on the part of the United Nations and its agencies required the strong support of Governments.

With regard to the establishment of focal points within the agencies to deal with poverty, he stressed that the simple act of designating them would do nothing to resolve the problems of coordination, conceptualization or implementation. If Governments identified poverty eradication as a priority, they should instruct the agencies to devise programmes which were endowed with adequate intellectual and financial resources.

As to the role of non-governmental organizations, he underscored the importance of ensuring that their activities were closely coordinated at the country level and corresponded with the recipient country's priorities.

Mr. STOBY (Director, Economic and Social Council Affairs and Inter-Agency Coordination Division) noted that the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/47) highlighted the problems to be addressed as well as gaps in the existing coordination mechanism. He invited delegations to comment on the points raised in the report with a view to the formulation of recommendations and guidelines. The report fully recognized the great need for a system-wide poverty-eradication strategy, and he urged delegations to comment in particular on the suggestions contained in paragraphs 113, 114, 116 and 117 of the report.

Mr. ORLIANGE (France) said that, in elaborating a strategy to combat poverty and considering the desirability of designating focal points, or poverty coordinators, it was essential to avoid an excessively narrow approach. While activities designed specifically to combat poverty could be useful, it was imperative to take into account the underlying causes of poverty, which was a result of both underdevelopment and development gone awry.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) acknowledged that it was difficult for the United Nations system to respond to General Assembly resolution 44/211 because some Governments were unable to draw up clear and coordinated poverty-alleviation strategies. Nevertheless, it was also the responsibility of the United Nations system to try to ensure that national strategies were sound and coordinated. The United Nations system should provide an integrated response to such strategies and change the current situation where Governments often dealt with the agencies concerned on an individual basis.

Mr. BHATIA (International Monetary Fund) said that, in view of the specific nature of poverty in each country, a formalized system of coordination for the various agencies was likely to prove unproductive. The United Nations system should help countries draw up their individual poverty-alleviation strategies and determine how it could help them. While coordination was necessary, the approach should be kept as flexible and informal as possible.

Mr. RASHIDI (Morocco) said that requests made to the United Nations system for financing poverty alleviation programmes were drawn up by government officials, who had a technocratic approach to development, rather than a participatory one. The United Nations system had to respect the priorities of Governments, but if a Government had no poverty-alleviation strategy, the system could not be expected to take action itself, unless that Government was obliged to implement programmes called for by the General Assembly in which the agencies had specific tasks in certain fields.

Mr. PAULINICH (Peru) said that it was clear from the discussion that poverty eradication was one of the most important priorities of the specialized agencies. He stressed the need for flexibility in improving coordination in poverty eradication and cautioned against establishing mandatory rules to be applied by all agencies. The existing system of coordination should be made more effective, while ensuring the necessary flexibility for tackling specific poverty-related problems in individual countries. Since the causes of poverty were deep-seated and multifarious, poverty could not be eradicated merely through improved coordination. Coordination should therefore aim at finding solutions to specific problems.

Mr. MALONE (Canada) stressed that the United Nations system could be very effective when it worked in a coordinated way. It was widely recognized by countries that United Nations expertise was very relevant to national strategies. It would be interesting to learn how the specialized agencies dealt with national bureaucracies in order to reach the most impoverished groups and ensure popular participation in alleviating poverty.

Mr. URZUA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) stressed the need to ensure that coordination was flexible and adaptable to different political circumstances. The major task at the country level was to define poverty-eradication programmes with the participation of government bodies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The expertise of all the relevant specialized agencies should be available for such programmes, and the responsibilites of each agency should be clearly defined. Above all, it was necessary to ensure coordination and a division of labour at the country level and at the same time maintain channels of communication with agency headquarters and regional offices to establish a broad framework for dealing with the problems encountered.

Mr. EDGREN (United Nations Development Programme) said that even in cases where Governments did not have poverty alleviation strategies or there was bureaucratic resistance to a campaign against poverty, there was always something that the United Nations system could do. In some countries primary education would lead to structural changes in the future. Agencies could work with non-governmental organizations to promote political empowerment and the participation of various groups which would then seek to bring about structural changes. It was essential to have a clear, long-term strategy. Over an extended period of time, resistance would weaken and political and economic changes would come about. Lastly, he stressed the need to focus on individual national situations, no two of which were exactly alike.

Mr. ALTESMAN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF had jointly drawn up a proposal for strengthened collaborative United Nations system efforts to help address poverty. The proposal focused on common country strategies; more effective links with the Bretton Woods institutions; more effective links among the operational, the research and the

(Mr. Altesman)

regional capacities of the United Nations system; monitoring of progress and official development assistance; and implementation of internationally agreed-upon goals and strategies. In each area there would be specific proposals on how to proceed further.

Mr. CHAMBERS (International Labour Organisation) said that he agreed entirely with the United Kingdom representative that it was the responsibility of the United Nations system to assist Governments. Nevertheless, that was a two-way process. If a Government made an effort to coordinate poverty alleviation, the United Nations system must do the same with regard to its own components. There were a number of ways in which the poor could be involved in strategies. Non-governmental women's organizations, for example, could be asked to identify specific problem areas and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes in carrying out basic development tasks. Although solutions for one group of poor people might be completely inappropriate for another, it was possible at the national level and through coordinated programming approaches in the United Nations system to involve the intended beneficiaries. In Latin America, for example, a fund was to be set up for indigenous peoples, in which they would define their own development needs and priorities. It was necessary to ensure participation by the poor in planning and conceptualization so that some of the egregious errors made in the past at the country level could be avoided.

Mr. BARNETT (United Kingdom) said that when Governments were unable to draw up a coordinated and clear poverty-alleviation strategy, it was due to lack of capacity rather than ill will. Accordingly, where there was no national strategy, it was a primary responsibility of the United Nations system to build the necessary national capacity to help Governments elaborate coordination strategies. The primary function of much of the work of the specialized agencies was national capacity-building.

Mr. EDGREN (United Nations Development Programme), introducing the proposal by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF for strengthened collaborative United Nations system efforts to help address poverty, said that the objective was to take country-level coordination several steps further by broadening the participation of the United Nations agencies in countries where Governments

(Mr. Edgren)

wanted them to undertake such work. The idea was to further systematize the monitoring of development assistance and the implementation of agreed goals and strategies relating to poverty in order to formulate general objectives for poverty eradication.

Mrs. BEKELE (World Health Organization) said that all the specialized agencies were very aware that one of their primary responsibilities was capacity-building. It was also important to help poor countries build the necessary infrastructure in order to be able to sustain development activities.

Mr. RASHIDI (Morocco) noted that there had been much discussion of deficiencies on the part of recipient Governments and shortcomings in the United Nations system. Consideration should also be given to the fact that only 6.5 per cent of bilateral official development assistance went to human development. When such assistance was given, there was always some sort of conditionality. If there must be conditionality, it should benefit the poor.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.